

Garden Report Fall 2007

Garden Anniversary

The summer of 2007 marked the 5th summer at the Middlebury College Organic Garden. I feel so fortunate to have worked with the many hundreds of students and community volunteers and the twenty summer interns who have created an amazing space for learning and growing.

New Projects

I want to begin by filling in some details of an event that was on the horizon when I wrote my Advisor's Report of 2006. As a result of the advocacy work of Jean Hamilton (class of '05 and one of the founders of the Organic Garden) Middlebury College became a member of Slow Food International, an organization that works to preserve and sustain the diversity of food production throughout the world. In October of 2006 with the financial support of the Environmental Affairs office Middlebury College sent John Warnow (class of '07), Emily Peterson (class of '08) and I to "Terra Madre" the Slow Food world wide conference in Turin, Italy. Eight other recent graduates of Middlebury (and former members of the Organic Garden group) also attended the conference. "Terra Madre" was a gathering of over 9000 farmers, academics and chefs from 150 countries. The Middlebury students were instrumental in establishing a youth forum for food security issues at Terra Madre and organizing a group of Middlebury faculty, administrators and students that would work to integrate the international food sustainability issues identified at "Terra Madre" into Middlebury College's strategic plan. The first project generated from the "Terra Madre" conference came in early April when Dining Services Director, Matthew Biette (who also attended Terra Madre) sponsored and organized a Slow Food dinner featuring seasonal food from Vermont. At that dinner Professor John Elder and other Middlebury faculty and students presented their research on the differences in maple syrup taste based on the locality of the producers. The next "Terra Madre" project was shepherded by Chris Howell ('05) who worked with Dining Services, Environmental Affairs, The Geography Department and the Organic Garden group to establish a summer research project to produce a "food map". A student received an internship for the summer 2007 to create a map of the origins and routes individual food items take from production to a typical meal served in the dining halls. The in-depth description of the project can be found at:

http://geography.middlebury.edu/applications/Food_Mapping/

As a result of a generous gift from a Middlebury College alumna the students were able to begin work on two projects that have been a priority for several years. As the beginning of a multi year project to create a natural windbreak at the garden Ben Falk of Whole Systems Design in Moretown, VT presented a workshop on "regenerative site design" at the garden in early May of 2007. Following the workshop 60 students planted 150 windbreak trees and shrubs at the garden site.

In August of 2007 a student designed and student built multi-use structure began taking shape. Using recycled material from College construction projects and lumber from Vermont Family Forests Hubert D'Autremont ('08) began work on a classroom/shade house. Professor John Elder held discussion sessions for his fall 2007 course "Visions of Nature" in this structure.

Internships

As a result of the generous support of alumni-sponsored internships, three students participated in the College Organic Garden this summer as full-time interns (Anne Mittnath '08, Rowan Braybrook '09 and Dan Kane '09). An additional, full-time intern (Julia Shipley '08), was funded by a supplemental alumni gift and earned income from the Garden.

Production Garden

In a summer where the weather was more like California than Vermont the garden produced a bumper crop of vegetables, herbs and flowers. The garden again expanded to include several new planting areas. The fire pit was revamped, the perennial garden renovated repairs made to the door of the composting toilet. Perfect growing conditions for grapes coincided with our first harvest from the vines planted in spring 2005. We also harvested our first asparagus crop. Along with sales of produce to Dining Services we supplied food to Otter Creek Bakery, American Flatbread, the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, the Grapevine Grille and donated many crops to the Addison County Food shelf.

Seed saving

After four years of the seed saving project several seed varieties are becoming favorites. "Corne de Bouc", "Green Zebra", "Peacevine", Persimmon and Valencia tomatoes, "Coco" black beans, "Slenderette" green beans, and Speckled Troutback lettuce have become favorites. Many parents and alumni stopped at the garden last fall to collect seeds for their own gardens. If you are interested in receiving seeds from the Organic Garden, please email us at:

mcog@middelbury.edu

Gardeners in the Community

Several garden alumni have been invited to speak to groups in Vermont and beyond. The year began with a presentation about the history of the Middlebury College Organic Garden to the Hawthorne Club by Alex Fuller ('04) and Jay Leshinsky. The Hawthorne Club is a group of Middlebury College and Addison County community leaders who have been getting together for over 50 years to strengthen bonds between the College and the Town of Middlebury.

Jay and four current students attended the Northeast Organic Farmers Association winter conference in February. At this conference Bennett Konesni ('05) presented a workshop on "Work Songs" based in his Watson Fellowship research.